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## A LITTLE-KNOWN COLONY.

BY

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Fifty years ago the names of British Honduras and Belize were as frequently uttered in the Senate of the United States as those of Nicaragua and Costa Rica are now, for in the discussion of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty the question of the rights and status of the tiny Government had to be defined and settled. Great Britain and the United States had agreed not to "assume or exercise any dominion over . . . any part of Central America," but their understanding was that the engagements of the convention did not apply to Her Majesty's settlement at Honduras. The name Central America was applied collectively to the several Republics there organized, and the little colony was allowed to pursue its quiet way, forgotten by the greater part of the world.

The early history of the country is the legend of the buccaneers, and to one of the most celebrated or notorious, a Scotchman of the name of Wallace, the capital owes its name. The Spanish pronunciation *Vallis* was easily corrupted to Ballis, and this again to Balize or Belize. The attempt to trace the derivation to the French *balise*, a beacon, or rather a buoy, cannot well be sustained, for there is no record of any beacon—and, in fact, that is exactly what a buccaneer would *not* erect, his chief aim being to secure a hidden refuge when pursued by the Coast-guard. The designation of British Honduras was not assumed until the appointment of a Lieut.-Governor in 1862, and it is regretted by the native races even now that the name Balize was ever changed, the colony being now frequently confounded with the Republic of Honduras. The first record of any British inhabitants in this or any part of Central America dates back to 1638, when a vessel was wrecked on the coast, and the nucleus of the settlement was formed; and in 1671 the Governor of Jamaica reports an increase of customs and commerce with Belize "more than any of His Majesty's colonies."

The industry of these early pioneers was directed to the same channels that engage the labor of their descendants—the cutting and exporting of logwood, cedar, and mahogany; and as all these woods then brought more than ten times the market price of later years, and the value of money was far greater, the colony rose in wealth and importance, and the dignity of its local government was enhanced. The administration was by Magistrates prior to 1786,

then by Superintendents appointed by the Crown, until, in 1862, it was ruled by a Lieut.-Governor, subordinate to the Governor of Jamaica. In 1884 it was created a Crown colony.

It must be remembered that until 1798 the people were really Britons and their slaves, settled in what was admittedly Spanish territory, and not at all with the consent of Spain, nor yet with even an acquiescence on the part of the native tribes of Indians, their neighbors in Yucatan. Frequently, during the eighteenth century, the colonists had to fight for their lives; but they prospered and gained in numbers and in strength, and had an apparently firm footing in their tropical home.

It is difficult on any principle of law to justify these early adventurers in forcing a settlement in what was Spanish territory, both by discovery and conquest, and the English Government, it must be said, afforded little aid or encouragement. In 1763 the Government of Spain recognised by treaty the right of British subjects to "cut, load, and carry away," unmolested, the woods of the country, but reserving to Spain the sovereignty of the soil.

It is more than likely that this concession was granted grudgingly, for the settlers were continually annoyed by official and unofficial interference and effort to control, continued for a number of years, until, in 1798, came the ultimatum and the battle of St. George's Cay, and from September 10 of that year the colony was free from Spain, and passed wholly under the jurisdiction of Great Britain. It is impossible to understand or explain the lack of progress in the colony; but if the old Baymen who helped to win that victory in 1798 were to visit the scenes of their prowess now, a century later, about all the changes they would notice would be the new source of light, petroleum, and the vessels moving with no aid from the winds—the steamers in the harbor. All else is unchanged. Yet British Honduras is a beautiful country, rich in woods and in fruits, with a soil the most fertile and a climate with which it would be hard to be discontented; and from the similarity of its geology to that of the surrounding Republics, it is certain that it contains much mineral wealth.

Those who wish for a few quiet weeks in the tropics could find no more restful, hardly a healthier resort. There are pleasant excursions for those who are fond of sailing or of riding, but there are no wagon roads in the colony. There is frequent communication *via* Mobile and New Orleans with the United States, and by the Harrison Line to Liverpool with Europe, and as these last-named steamers touch at Vera Cruz, in Mexico, the return trip to the United States may be made through that wonderful Republic.